

a need for additional amendments—apparently, Senator HARKIN indicated it would be reasonable if there were 17 perhaps on their side and 14 on our side. Whatever the number is that would help us reach a conclusion would be very important for our being able to advance the legislation that came out of the committee, without a dissenting vote.

There are 21 Members of the Senate Agriculture Committee, Republicans and Democrats. This farm bill came out without a single dissenting vote. It is paid for, it is less costly than the President's farm proposal, and it has the beginnings of reform.

This is a reasonable offer. Certainly, Senator REID made it. If you look at previous farm bills, typically the number of recorded votes have been about 20 amendments, sometimes a bit more, sometimes a bit less. On average, there have been around 20 amendments that have actually been voted on. Senator REID's proposal would have 17 rollcall votes before final passage. So that would be a bit below the average. The leader has made clear that if there are some additional amendments that are required in order to advance this proposal, he is open to doing that.

The current farm bill expires this year. Farmers need to know and their bankers need to know what the rules of the road are going to be. So it is absolutely essential we get this legislation through the Senate and we have an opportunity to go to conference with the House to work out the differences in the early part of next year.

Let me make one final point, if I may. Some are saying just extend the current farm bill by a year or two. First of all, we know that if it is a 1-year extension, it will be 2 years because next year is an election year. Beyond that, our colleagues should know the baseline for writing a farm bill is based on the last 5 years of experience with farm legislation. That baseline is already down substantially because the last farm bill cost \$17 billion less than the estimates at the time it was written. That baseline is going to go only in one direction for the commodity provisions at least, and that is down.

So anybody who is concerned about writing a farm bill that meets the needs of the American people—not just the commodity title but nutrition, conservation, research, and all the rest—should understand this noose is going to do nothing but get tighter. It is already very tight—very tight.

I hope our colleagues on the other side bend their best efforts to come up with a response to the proposal the majority leader made to reach conclusion, and I hope they do it soon. The clock is ticking. American farm and ranch families across this country are waiting. We should not ask them to wait past Christmas. So much needs to be done, so many decisions need to be made, but Congress needs to act now.

I yield the floor.

UNANIMOUS-CONSENT REQUEST— H.R. 3074

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the consideration of the conference report to accompany H.R. 3074, the Transportation-HUD, related agencies appropriations, 2008; that there be 20 minutes of debate with respect to the conference report, with the time equally divided and controlled between Senators MURRAY and BOND or their designees; that upon the use or yielding back of time, the Senate proceed to vote on adoption of the conference report, without further intervening action or debate.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Mr. SPECTER. Mr. President, on behalf of the Republican leadership, I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

The Senator from Washington.

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, I have come to the floor today to make sure the record is clear on the difference between what is being said in Washington, DC, today and what is actually taking place.

Yesterday, President Bush took to the microphones to complain for the second day in a row that Congress was not getting its work done. For a second day in a row, he complained that Congress is not sending him appropriations bills that fund the most basic functions of Government. And for a second day in a row, our minority leader, Senator MCCONNELL, followed suit. He came out on the Senate floor and complained that Congress has not sent the appropriations bills to the President.

Let's be clear, I made a request to pass the final conference bill for the transportation-housing appropriations bill so it could be sent to President Bush. What was the result? The Republican Senators blocked it from going to the White House, and that was not the first time that happened. They blocked the transportation-housing appropriations bill from going to the White House twice before. Mr. President, 2½ weeks ago on November 15, they blocked it; 2½ weeks ago on November 16, they blocked it; and then they blocked it again today.

Let me tell you what is going on here. President Bush and the Senate Republican leadership are trying to quietly block our progress on funding the needs of the American people while loudly complaining about our failure to make progress.

I would understand the actions of the Senate Republican leadership if our transportation-housing bill was partisan or divisive, but the conference agreement we are trying to move again today has the support of every single Republican who sat on the conference committee in the House and in the Senate. That bill originally passed the Senate with 88 votes. That conference agreement has already passed the House with 270 votes.

This is not a controversial bill. It makes critical investments in some of the most urgent needs of the American people and their local communities. That bill provides \$195 million to replace the I-35W bridge that collapsed in Minnesota, an issue all of us came out on the floor and said we would move rapidly to take care of. It is sitting right here in the Senate, one step away from getting it to the President to be signed into law, and the Republican leadership said no. So they are loudly complaining about our failure to make progress.

I would understand the actions of the Senate Republican leadership if they had not taken a look at this bill and realized the critical funding in it. Besides the \$195 million for the I-35W bridge, we have \$1 billion in enhanced highway formula funding so all our States—all 50 States—can inspect and make repairs to their most deficient bridges, an issue we all agreed was important.

We have \$75 million in new housing vouchers that will shelter homeless veterans, including our struggling veterans who have returned from Iraq and Afghanistan. This is critical funding for which our communities and our veterans are waiting.

It rejects hundreds of millions of dollars in cuts that were originally proposed by the White House, cuts that would have thrown Amtrak into bankruptcy and made the congestion at our airports worse, not better.

Our bill also includes \$200 million which is urgently needed to provide housing counseling services to keep struggling mortgage holders in their homes.

I wish to take a moment to talk about that last item, the \$200 million for housing counseling. This Nation is in the middle of a housing crisis. Millions of homeowners are at risk of losing their homes in the next few quarters as interest rates on billions and billions of dollars in mortgages are being adjusted upward.

On Monday, a few days ago, the President's own Treasury Secretary, Hank Paulson, and his Housing Secretary, Alphonso Jackson, made speeches on the need for Congress to address the many steps necessary to minimize this crisis. Secretary Paulson complained at a national housing forum about the number of borrowers who were entering foreclosure without contacting either their lender or their mortgage counselor. He said:

For this public outreach campaign to be successful, there must be enough trained mortgage counselors to answer the phone when homeowners call. The administration requested funding for NeighborWorks America and other nonprofit mortgage counseling operations in its budget.

EXTENSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator's time under morning business has expired.